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AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please amend the Claims as follows. Insertions are shown underlined while deletions are ~~struck through~~. Please add Claims 9-19.

1 (original): An aqueous coating composition comprising, as essential components, a synthetic resin emulsion (A) having a pH value of 4.0 to 10.0 and a neutral silica sol (B) having a particle diameter of 1 to 200 nm and a pH value of 5.0 to less than 8.5, wherein the neutral silica sol (B) component is contained in an amount of 0.1 to 50 parts by weight in terms of solid content relative to 100 parts by weight of the solid content of the synthetic resin emulsion (A).

2 (original): The aqueous coating composition according to claim 1, which further comprises aggregate (E) having a particle diameter of 0.05 to 5 mm in an amount of 100 to 4000 parts by weight relative to 100 parts by weight of the solid content of the synthetic resin emulsion (A).

3 (original): The aqueous coating composition according to claim 1, which further comprises a coloring pigment (C), an extender pigment (D), and aggregate (E) having a particle diameter of 0.05 to 5 mm such that 1 to 300 parts by weight of the coloring pigment (C), 10 to 1000 parts by weight of the extender pigment (D) and 10 to 2000 parts by weight of the aggregate (E) are contained per 100 parts by weight of the solid content of the synthetic resin emulsion (A).

4 (original): The aqueous coating composition according to claim 1, which further comprises at least one kind of colored coating (F) dispersed in a granular state.

5 (currently amended): The aqueous coating composition according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 4~~, wherein the neutral silica sol has been subjected to hydrophobation treatment.

6 (new): The aqueous coating composition according to claim 2, wherein the neutral silica sol has been subjected to hydrophobation treatment.

7 (new): The aqueous coating composition according to claim 3, wherein the neutral silica sol has been subjected to hydrophobation treatment.

8 (new): The aqueous coating composition according to claim 4, wherein the neutral silica sol has been subjected to hydrophobation treatment.

9 (new): An aqueous coating composition comprising:

a binder constituted by a synthetic resin emulsion (A) having a pH value of 4.0 to 10.0; and

an anti-staining agent constituted by a neutral silica sol (B) having a particle diameter of 1 to 200 nm and a pH value of 5.0 to less than 8.5, said anti-staining agent being mixed uniformly with the binder,

wherein the solid content of the neutral silica sol (B) is 0.1 to 50 parts by weight relative to 100 parts by weight of the solid content of the synthetic resin emulsion (A).

10 (new): The aqueous coating composition according to claim 9, wherein the synthetic resin emulsion (A) is selected from the group consisting of (i) an acrylic resin-based emulsion obtained by radical polymerization of an acrylic monomer or by radical copolymerization of an acrylic monomer with another monomer copolymerizable therewith, (ii) an acrylic silicon resin-based emulsion obtained by radical polymerization of a silicon-containing acrylic monomer or by radical copolymerization of a silicon-containing acrylic monomer with another monomer copolymerizable therewith, (iii) a fluorine resin-based emulsion obtained by radical copolymerization of a fluorine-containing monomer or by radical copolymerization of a fluorine-containing monomer with another monomer copolymerizable therewith, (iv) an urethane resin-based emulsion which after formation of a coating film, has urethane bond in the coating film, and (v) other crosslinkable type emulsions utilizing crosslinking reaction between a carbonyl group and hydrazide group, carboxylic acid and metal ion, epoxy group and amine, epoxy group and carboxyl group, carboxylic acid and aziridine, carboxylic acid and carbodiimide, carboxylic acid and oxazoline or acetoacetate and ketimine, besides the crosslinking reaction between a hydroxyl group and isocyanate compound.

11 (new): The aqueous coating composition according to claim 9, wherein the neutral silica sol (B) includes particles made of a compound which is formed by hydrolysis condensation of silicate, is rigid, and has silanol groups (Si-OH) on the surfaces of the particles.

12 (new): The aqueous coating composition according to claim 9, wherein the neutral silica sol (B) includes particles having a diameter of 1 to 200 nm in terms of primary particle diameter.

13 (new): The aqueous coating composition according to claim 9, wherein the neutral silica sol (B) does not include colloidal silica.

14 (new): The aqueous coating composition according to claim 9, wherein the neutral silica sol (B) has an electrical conductivity of up to 3 mS/cm.

15 (new): The aqueous coating composition according to claim 9, wherein the neutral silica sol (B) is hydrophobation-treated.

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16 (new): The aqueous coating composition according to claim 15, wherein the neutral silica sol (B) is hydrophobation-treated by complexing a compound (p) having at least one functional group selected from an alkoxy group and a hydroxyl group with the neutral silica sol.

17 (new): The aqueous coating composition according to claim 16, wherein the component (p) is fluorine alcohol.

18 (new): The aqueous coating composition according to claim 9, wherein the neutral silica sol (B) is neutral silica sol complexed with a polyoxyalkylene group-containing compound.

19 (new): A method of forming a coating on an object, comprising:

providing the aqueous coating composition of claim 9; and

applying the aqueous coating composition onto a surface of the object to form thereon a clear coating, a glossy coating, a flatting coating, a natural stone-like coating material, a thin finishing coating material, a thick finishing coating material, or a multicolor design coating.